

Making sustainable communication choices

Staying connected with each other has never been more important. However, the way organisations communicate with their members has an environmental impact. This case study explores some of these impacts and looks at how we can reduce them.

Historic Environment Scotland members magazine case study

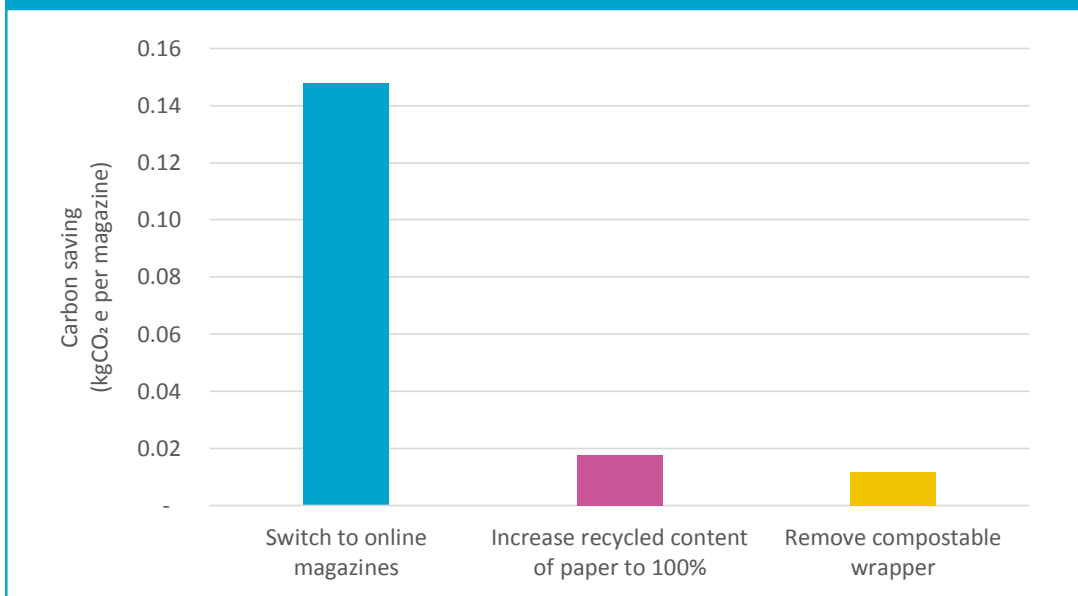
Zero Waste Scotland has been supporting Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to measure and reduce the impacts of its magazine.

In 2020-21, HES sent 251,000 magazines to its members. Three changes were made to reduce their impacts:

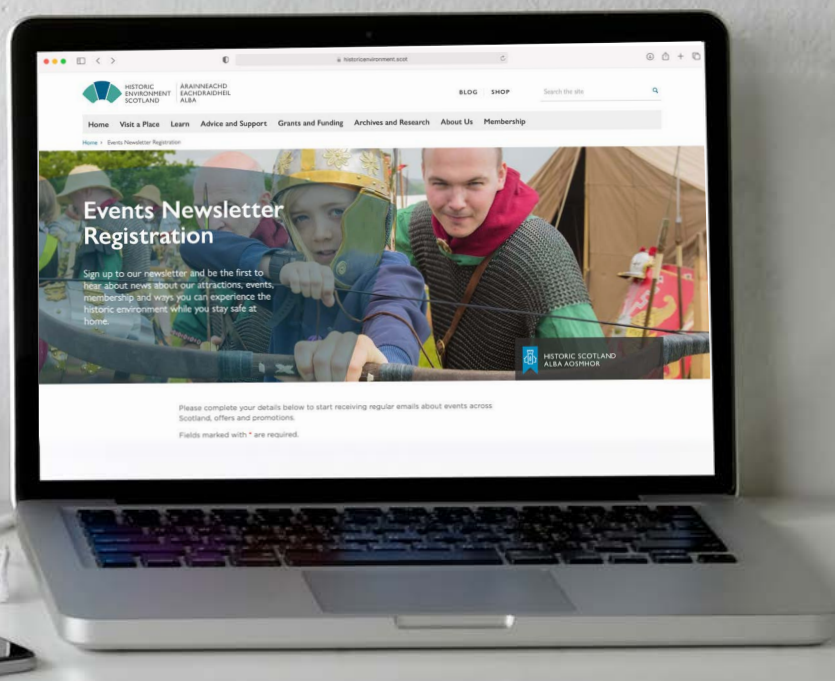
- 4,550 subscribers switched to online magazines;
- Recycled content of paper magazines was increased from 18% to 100%;
- A trial removal of the compostable plastic wrapper was conducted.

Each magazine originally had a carbon impact of 148 gCO₂e – the greenhouse gas savings are almost the same as the weight of each magazine itself (160g). Switching to an online magazine saves the most carbon because all the impacts from paper and plastic production are avoided (figure 1). Using recycled materials and reducing packaging reduce impacts further.

Figure 1. Carbon savings per magazine, from sustainable actions



Overall, HES has reduced the carbon impacts of its magazines by 7.9 tonnes of CO₂e, or 21%.



This change has had other environmental benefits as well. Paper production requires large quantities of fresh water. Recycled paper consumes nearly four times less water than new paper¹. By recycling paper, the need for new paper production is reduced and it gives our old paper a new lease of life, preventing it from becoming waste.

The carbon impact of digital communication

Zero Waste Scotland research has established that sending an attachment in an email can have much greater carbon impacts than providing weblinks for digital communications. A large attachment might generate 50gCO₂e, whereas a simple weblink click is about 0.5 gCO₂e. By providing a link, those who wish to access the document do so via one copy, rather than receiving a copy each.

Learnings for other businesses

By moving magazines and other communications to online formats and switching to recycled paper your business can become more sustainable. Such actions reduce an organisation's carbon footprint, water consumption and material impacts. The nature of digital communications also has a carbon impact – weblinks are lower impact than attachments.

Zero Waste Scotland can support your business to make more sustainable choices. Contact Zero Waste Scotland for more details.

¹ DEFRA (2012) Streamlined LCA of Paper Supply System